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ABSTRACT

Class awareness among rural children was investigated in three dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and evaluative. Data were obtained from 378 white students in grades K-8 in 9 rural elementary schools in the Upper Cumberland region of middle Tennessee. Children's social class background (SES) was determined by their father's occupational strata (professional and business, white collar jobs, blue collar jobs and service workers) and their parental education level (college education, high school education, and below high school education). Picture-test with figures representing the upper, middle, and lower social classes was used. Figures were simple pen drawings of three men, three women, three male children, and three female children. There were also drawings of houses and automobiles representing the three social classes. Findings included: much of the development of social class awareness occurred between first and eighth grades; the accuracy in understanding of cognitive cues increased substantially between grades one and two; most of the developmental process of cognitive class awareness was completed by the fifth grade; both SES and parental education were found to be significantly related to class awareness on all three dimensions; and sex did not seem to be related with class awareness among rural children. (NQ)

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DEVELOPMENT OF CLASS AWARENESS AMONG RURAL CHILDREN*

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DEVELOPMENT OF CLASS AWARENESS AMONG RURAL CHILDREN

The Problem

It has been noted in earlier studies (Lasswell, 1958; 1961; Lasswell and Parshall, 1961) that most adults hold to popular conceptions of social classes which are comprised of sets of stereotypes. Researchers also suggest that these stereotypes are well developed by the time a person reaches adolescence (cf. Centers, 1950; Congatton, 1952; Himmelweit et. al., 1952; Montague, 1954). These findings call for studies investigating the developmental process of acquiring the stereotypes - that means, the development of class awareness.

Estvan, in his extensive studies on children's social perception (Estvan, 1952; 1958; 1965; 1966; Estvan and Estvan, 1959), emphasized how children view their social world, particularly, what they say about "life situations" in rural and urban environment; in child and adult activities; and in different socioeconomic background. Regarding social status perception, Estvan indicated that increasing age to be related to increasing awareness of status symbols, whereas intelligence and rural-urban background were not related to child's perception of social class.

Three other studies have been noticed, focusing on children's perception of social status. In the first comprehensive study by Standler (1949), the researcher sampled children at four grade levels: first, fourth, sixth, and eighth, and stratified the sample by class position and sex. Several test procedures were used to test class awareness in the children. The major test was a picture test containing four sets of pictures illustrating homes, recreation, dresses, and jobs

at three socioeconomic levels. Stendler found that the first-grade child was not aware of social class and could not relate the pictures with social class, but as the child grew older he became able to rate the pictures better with reasonings, like that of the adults. The researcher also indicated that the child's intelligence and social class background were related to his ability to correctly rate the pictures.

After a decade, Jahoda (1959) conducted a research in this area by introducing a test procedure involved making "socially congruous" pictures by assembling puzzle-like drawings, with a mixture of different social class drawings. Unlike Stendler, Jahoda found that children at the first-grade were also perceiving class differences, and their ability to correctly rate the pictures were largely due to intelligence.

The only other study in this area was reported in 1971 by Jeannette Tudor. Tudor tested class awareness on cognitive, behavioral, and evaluative dimensions among children in grades one, four, and six of a southern metropolitan school system. Picture-test with figures representative of three social classes was used in this study. The researcher found that on cognitive test, age and sex were related to the subject's performance, whereas on behavioral test, age, social class, and IQ were found to be related to performance. The evaluative test indicated no significant results.

The present study is an attempt to investigate class awareness among school children in rural area, by replicating Tudor's method of investigation. Class awareness is investigated in three dimensions: cognitive dimension; behavioral dimension; and evaluative dimension.

The cognitive dimension of social class awareness is seen as the simple perception or recognition of social differences. The behavioral dimension is concerned with the recognition that "behavioral differences are linked to cognitive cues." The evaluative dimension is comprised of "the attachment of evaluations (good or bad) on the basis of cognitive cues."

These three dimensions are seen distinctly separate from one another, but leading to the common focus of interest - the awareness of social class. It is argued that simple recognition of social class differences neither signifies an awareness that behavioral differences are linked to cognitive cues, nor does it indicate an awareness that evaluations are connected to different classes on the basis of these cues. For example, although formal education is related to social class, a child's ability to distinguish between social classes does not necessarily suggest his awareness that members in one class may be more educated that those of the other. Similarly, neither a child's ability to distinguish between social classes, nor his perception of behavioral differences, necessarily suggests his awareness that members in one class are perceived as "better" than those of the other, though adults generally perceive "lower-class people" as somehow "not as good as" "upper-class people."

This research is designed to study the developmental process of class awareness among rural children in the following lines of investigation:

(1) When do children begin to perceive class differences?

(2) When do children begin to recognize that behavior patterns are class related?

(3) When does the evaluative component of class awareness develop?

(4) How do the variables of sex, age, and social class background of the child affect the development of awareness on cognitive, behavioral and evaluative dimensions?

Test Instrument

Picture-test with figures representing three social classes: upper, middle and lower is used in this study. These figures are simple pen drawings[1] of three men, three woman, three male children, and three female children. There are also drawings of houses and automobiles representing the three classes of figures. Dress cues, cleanliness, and hair-style cues can be used in differentiating the figure drawings.

The test instrument is divided into three parts, one for each dimension of class awareness. For cognitive test, the child is asked to group the human figures into families, and to match houses and automobiles with the adult female and adult male figures respectively, maintaining the social class position. The test is set up in the following manner: the father figure in each family is placed on a table by the interviewer and the child is given the nine remaining figures and asked to match the mother, male child and female child with the father. Next, the three houses are placed on the table and the child is asked to match the mother figure with the house, and the same process is repeated with the father figures and automobiles. One point is scored for each correct matching. The score range on this test is from 0 to 15.

The other two parts of the test instrument consist of behavioral and evaluative questions about opposing figure drawings. For example, on the behavioral test the child is shown the "upper-class" and "lower-class" father figures and asked to point out which one went to college and completed more than four years of college education. On the evaluative test the child is shown the "middle class" and "lower class" male children figures and asked to decide and point out which of these two boys may be disliked by the "upper class" male child and hence would not want to play with. There are thirty items on the behavioral test and six items on the evaluative test. Each child is interviewed alone, and on each test item he is scored one point for each correct answer. The score range on behavioral test is from 0 to 30, and that of the evaluative test is from 0 to 6.

This test instrument was pretested among 15 college students and 15 children ranging in ages from five to twelve. The college students were considered the adult sample and also served as a validation group. Only those behavioral and evaluative pretest items, which had 100 percent agreement in the adult sample about the "correct figure" choice were included in the instrument. The child sample served as assurance that young children could understand the items and could tolerate the lengthy interview.

The reliability and validity of the test instrument are supported with the argument that class awareness is a developmental construct, and the existence of a strong correlationship (r=.917) between age and class awareness score, obtained by summing across the three tests. Also, there is internal consistency within each test.

Data

Data were collected from kindergarten, grades one through eight in nine public elementary schools of the rural county school system in the Upper Cumberland region of middle Tennessee. First, the grades were selected randomly taking one from each school, and then interviewed all children in that grade. In this procedure, around 50 children from each grade were interviewed, except from grades four, seven and eight where there were between 30 - 40 children in each grade in the selected schools. The age range of the children was from five to seventeen years. The sample was limited to white children, which was unintentional.[2] Children's social class background was based on occupational information of the head of household. This information was obtained from school records. Educational information on parents were also obtained either from the school records or from the class teachers. Any child for whom parental occupation and education were unknown or doubtful was eliminated from the analysis. Thus, a total sample size of 378 was obtained for the present analysis.

Social class background (SES) of the children were determined by their fathers' occupational strata. Following an earlier work reported by Mookherjee (1971), father's occupation was divided into three categories of "professional and business," "white collar jobs," and "blue collar jobs and service works," with the respective categories being considered as "High SES," "Medium SES," and "Low SES."[3]

The child's parental education level was classified into three categories as follows: "College education" - "High PED," "High School education" - "Medium PED," and "Below High School education" - "Low PED."

Parental education was used here as an additional dimension of social background of the child.

Results

The results for analyses of variance indicating main effects on cognitive, behavioral and evaluative dimensions of class awareness are presented in Table 1. Table 2 presents the means for significant main effects on each of the above dimensions.

The analysis of variance indicates three significant main effects: age, socioeconomic status and parental education on cognitive, behavioral and evaluative dimensions.[4] It is evidenced from Table 2 that among rural children much of the development of social class awareness occurs between first and eighth grades, that means, between ages six and fourteen. This research indicates that the accuracy in understanding of cognitive cues increases substantially between grades one and two, and to a smaller extent between grades three and four, four and five, and six and seven. The mean scores on cognitive test for fifth graders and above appear to be very close to the "perfect" score of 15. Hence, basing on the measurements of the test instrument it can be said that most of the developmental process of class awareness is completed by the time a child reaches the fifth grade.

To test whether the developmental process of class awareness has begun by the time children reach the kindergarten or the first grade, we have compared the mean scores of the children on cognitive test with the "expected score"[5] on the test if the pictures are randomly grouped on each question. Any score on cognitive test, then, differing from the "expected score" of 4.99 can be considered as better than or worse than

a random preference. The results of the t-tests performed with null hypothesis that $\mu = 4.99$ reveal that both the kindergarten and first-grade children are grouping the pictures randomly rather than on the basis of cues in the pictures. This finding indicates that the developmental process of class awareness on cognitive dimension among rural children has not begun at the age of five or six. However, other t-tests results show that the second or third grader children are grouping the figures on the basis of cues in the pictures ($p < .001$).

Social class background and parental education are found to be related to cognitive class awareness, but sex does not seem to be related with class awareness among rural children (see Tables 1 and 2). Over all grades, the upper-class children appear to be most aware of cognitive differences between figures, followed by the middle-class and lower-class children in that order. Children with high-parental education, similarly, show highest awareness of cognitive differences between the pictures, followed by the middle- and low-parental education. The latter finding, further, supports the relationship of social class background and cognitive class awareness.[6] Table 3 presents the mean scores on cognitive, behavioral and evaluative tests for social class and parental education within each grade. The social class differences on cognitive dimension within kindergarten and first-grade are slight, having all children scores close to the "expected score," but the differences become larger as we approach to higher grades. This finding indicates that social class background of the child appears to begin affecting in the developmental process of class awareness in grade one, and continues to have a strong effect afterwards. Similar effect is noted with the parental education or cognitive dimension of class awareness (for Grade 3, $r = .397$, $p < .001$).

The behavioral test shows significant effects of age, social class, and parental education (see Table 1). On the behavioral test each child has a 50 percent probability of selecting the correct picture by chance alone. As there are 30 items on this test, any score differing from 15 deviates from the expectation of the sampling distribution of random selections of pictures. Although the children in kindergarten and first-grade do not perform better than randomly selecting the correct picture, they are aware of the behavioral correlates of cognitive cues[7] (see Table 2). A large increase in mean scores between grade one and grades two, three and four indicates that the understanding of the behavior patterns related to the figures in the pictures has taken firm hold during the period the child becomes seven to nine years old. Another large increase in mean scores between grade four and grades five thru eight leads us to suspect that the developmental process in understanding class related behavior patterns is completed by the time children reach age ten or eleven.

Social class background and parental education are also found to be related to behavioral correlates of class awareness, but sex is not related with behavioral awareness (see Tables 1 and 2). Here again, among all graders, upper-class children seem to be most aware of behavioral differences between figures, and in an order followed by middle-class and lower-class children. The same pattern of performance is noted with the parental education.[8] The social class differences on behavioral dimension of class awareness within kindergarten and first-grade children are not much (see Table 3). Although the majority of these children scoring below the "expected score," test results[9] show that these children are aware of behavioral patterns related to the figures in the pictures.

In addition, the finding that the differences between the behavioral score and the score by chance become larger as we move to higher grades, suggests that social class background of the child starts affecting in the understanding of class related behavioral patterns at the earlier ages, and continues to have stronger effects afterwards. Similar results are noted with the parental education on behavioral dimension of class awareness.[10] As the number of cases in each category of social class and parental education become smaller within grades, it is difficult to comment on which social class background children at which age become more aware of class related behavioral patterns.

It is interesting to note that although sex is found to be unrelated with behavioral dimension of class awareness, a strong relationship is apparent among the seventh and eight grade children regarding these factors.[11] At this age, girls are able to recognize the behavioral patterns more precisely than those of the boys. The differences between the mean scores of boys and girls are found to be significant (t-value for Grade 7=2.921, $p < .01$; t-value for Grade 8=1.961, $p < .05$). This distinction is due to the differentiation in socialization patterns between males and females at this age. By age twelve or thirteen, females move into a feminine subculture, and maybe the adult feminine sex-roles sharpen their awareness of behavioral patterns.

The F-ratios for analysis of variance show three significant main effects of age, social class and parental education on evaluative dimension of class awareness (see Table 1). It is apparent from Table 2 that the developmental process in evaluation of social class differences has already begun before the child reaches grade one. The accuracy in perception of evaluative cues increases substantially as he grows older.[12]

The sixth-grade students have obtained the highest mean score of 5.58, which is very close to the "perfect" score of 6. Accordingly, as the test instrument measures class evaluations, we can say that most of the developmental process is completed by the time children become twelve years of age. Since the probability on this test of getting any item correct by chance is 50 percent, mean scores above 3 are better than the "expected" performances. A t-test result indicates that even the kindergarten children are scoring significantly ($p < .001$) above random scores (though slightly). These observations suggest that possibly the evaluative components of class awareness develop at the earlier ages.

Both social class and parental education are related to evaluative awareness, but sex is not related (see Tables 1 and 2). Among all children, upper-class children or children whose parental education are high again seem to be most aware of evaluative differences between figures in the test, followed by the children in middle- and low-ranks of social class background or parental education in that order.[13] When we compare the evaluative scores within grades, almost all children are scoring better than the "expected score" by chance irrespective of their social class background and grade. Here again, except in fewer cases, the upper-class children are doing better than the middle-class or lower-class children. A few variations of this pattern, as noted here, presumably are due to small sample size and lack of controlled experiment. The differences between the evaluative test score and the score by chance become larger as we approach to higher grades, particularly among the upper-class children. These findings indicate that in the developmental process of class awareness, especially in evaluative components, social class background and parental education start affecting at the earlier

ages of the child, and remain affecting till the child reaches adolescence.[14]

It should be pointed out that although sex is not found to be a contributing factor in the development of evaluative components of class awareness, a relationship is noted between sex and evaluative score among seventh-grade children (γ=.4210, $p < .01$). Girls seem to be more conscious about the evaluative components of class differences at this age.[15] This finding, again, may be interpreted as the result of differentiation in socialization patterns between males and females, especially at this age of twelve or thirteen when the girls move into a feminine subculture.

Summary and Discussion

The above findings indicate that children in rural areas are aware of class-related differences among the pictures, and the developmental process of awareness starts long before the children reach the kindergarten level of formal education. Social class background and parental education are found to be affecting strongly in the developmental process of acquiring the stereotypes to understand social class differentiations.

On the cognitive test both the kindergarten and first-grade children, although performing above the random expectation, are not keenly aware of the cognitive cues in the pictures. However, this research indicates that the accuracy in understanding of cognitive cues increases substantially between grades one and two, and by the time children reach fifth grade, most of the developmental process of cognitive class awareness is completed. The research results, further, suggest that children of age six in rural area may not always be able to

recognize the physical differences between figures in the pictures, but they are aware of the behavioral patterns as well as the evaluative components of class differentials. Both social class background and parental education of children appear to be significant factors related to class awareness on the cognitive, behavioral and evaluative dimensions. In most of the cases, upper-class children are performing best on these tests, followed by middle-class and lower-class children in that order. Children with high-parental education, similarly, show highest awareness of cognitive, behavioral and evaluative differences between the pictures, followed by the middle- and low-parental education. These observations indicate that social class background and parental education of children start affecting in the developmental process of class awareness in age six or even earlier, and continue to influence substantially in later ages.

Some similarities and dissimilarities are noted while comparing the results of this study with those of the urban study (Tudor, 1971). Similar to Tudor's observation, the developmental process of cognitive awareness among children in rural setting seems to be completed by the time children reach eleven to twelve years of age. In addition, this research suggests that the major development of this awareness occurs between ages six and seven (between grades one and two). However, this data-set does not specify clearly whether the perception of cognitive cues of class differentials has developed in kindergarten or first-grade children. Unlike Tudor, this study reveals a strong relationship between social class background and cognitive class awareness. Social class background of children is also found to be affecting the development of behavioral awareness. Upper-class children appear to be most aware of

cognitive cues as well as behavioral patterns between figures in the pictures. Tudor's analysis also indicates sex to be related to cognitive dimension in such a way that "girls are better at grouping the figures than are boys" (1971:475), while the present analysis does not show relationship between sex and class awareness, in general, but supports that girls become more conscious of class-related behavioral patterns and evaluative components than those of boys, by the time they all reach seventh grade. Probably this is due to the differentiation in socialization patterns between males and females at this age.

In the urban study, the evaluative test shows no significant results (Tudor, 1971:474-475), whereas the present study indicates the existence of strong relationships between age, social class background, and evaluative components of class awareness. This finding suggests that the development of evaluative cues of class awareness among rural children may occur at the same time the cognitive and behavioral components develop, and the social class background and parental education of the children exert substantial influence in this developmental process of class awareness. Moving a step further, it may be interpreted that the developmental process of perception of differences in class-related correlates are learned through evaluation by socializing agents, and that is why the kindergarten and first-grade children are not performing in the cognitive and behavioral tests as "good" as in the evaluative test (cf. Tudor, 1971; Hess and Torney, 1967).

It should be remembered, as a final note, that before generalizing the results and interpretations reported in this paper, the limitations of having our subjects restricted to white children from rural area in the South, the smallness of sample size and lack of controlled experiment need to be considered.

Table 1: F-ratios for Main Effects on the Cognitive, Behavioral and Evaluative Tests

Source	F-ratio	Probability
Cognitive:		
Age	16.918	$<.001$
Sex	2.458	$>.100$
SES	9.380	$<.001$
Parental Education	8.312	$<.001$
Behavioral		
Age	23.935	$<.001$
Sex	2.256	$>.100$
SES	12.425	$<.001$
Parental Education	19.721	$<.001$
Evaluative		
Age	4.191	$<.001$
Sex	<1.00	
SES	10.205	$<.001$
Parental Education	11.402	$<.001$

Table 2: Significant Main Effects, Cognitive, Behavioral and Evaluative Tests

Source	N	Cognitive	Behavioral	Evaluative
KG	50	5.32	12.22	3.84
Grade 1	46	5.52	12.35	4.39
Grade 2	53	10.15	18.36	5.11
Grade 3	56	8.52	16.25	4.50
Grade 4	24	10.04	19.17	4.88
Grade 5	49	12.43	25.12	5.55
Grade 6	50	11.80	21.74	5.58
Grade 7	25	13.12	25.76	5.04
Grade 8	25	11.44	23.92	5.04
Mean	378	9.50	18.74	4.86
Range		0-15	0-30	0-6
High SES	122	10.74	20.96	5.29
Med SES	143	9.34	18.50	4.86
Low SES	113	8.35	16.64	4.40
High PED	122	10.76	21.58	5.38
Med PED	112	9.16	18.47	4.74
Low PED	144	8.68	16.53	4.51

Table 3: Mean Scores on Cognitive, Behavioral and Evaluative Tests by Social Class and Parental Education, within Grades

Dimensions of Class Awareness	Social Class and Parental Education	Grades								
		KG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Cognitive	Hi SES	6.64	5.50	10.17	10.40	13.50	12.64	14.20	13.00	-
	Med SES	5.00	6.32	9.23	7.00	10.00	11.44	11.90	13.00	11.86
	Lo SES	4.91	4.56	13.00	7.89	9.54	13.00	10.88	13.33	10.91
	Hi PED	6.50	7.67	10.00	10.09	13.50	12.23	10.67	13.50	10.50
	Med PED	5.12	5.24	8.75	10.27	8.20	14.50	12.85	12.50	11.00
	Lo PED	5.08	5.56	10.62	6.17	10.18	13.00	11.29	13.78	12.33
Behavioral	Hi SES	14.09	12.17	18.58	21.20	22.00	25.49	24.40	25.33	-
	Med SES	10.82	11.73	16.00	15.29	18.11	26.33	22.76	26.15	23.93
	Lo SES	12.36	13.17	24.00	11.89	19.46	-	19.06	25.33	23.91
	Hi PED	12.25	14.33	18.61	21.23	22.00	25.48	20.67	25.50	25.50
	Med PED	11.65	11.84	19.50	16.64	19.40	27.50	22.80	26.42	23.86
	Lo PED	12.60	12.72	17.81	11.30	18.76	-	21.19	25.00	23.67
Evaluative	Hi SES	3.64	5.17	5.22	5.75	3.50	5.74	5.60	4.00	-
	Med SES	4.00	4.86	4.62	3.94	4.78	5.33	5.66	5.08	5.14
	Lo SES	3.82	3.56	5.75	3.68	5.15	-	5.44	5.33	4.91
	Hi PED	3.88	5.33	5.10	5.82	3.50	5.64	5.56	5.25	6.00
	Med PED	3.35	4.72	5.50	4.73	5.00	6.00	5.70	4.67	5.44
	Lo PED	4.16	3.78	5.05	3.13	5.00	-	5.48	4.50	5.67

FOOTNOTES

[1] The pictures were first drawn by an artist using color pens, and then those were copied on the Xerox machine in black and white. These black and white pictures were used in the study. All facial expressions were "neutral."

[2] There were no children from other racial groups in the sampled grades and schools.

[3] These categories are somewhat patterned after the Hollingshead and Redlich classification in Social Class and Mental Illness (1958:390-391).

[4] Computations for two-way and three-way interactions were not pursued because some requirements of the tests were not met.

[5] The "expected score" theoretically is the mean of the sampling distribution of all scores when the pictures are randomly grouped. For the family grouping the "expected score" is computed by calculating the mean score from the sum of all possible scores divided by the total number of all possible ways of getting scores. Similarly, the "expected score" for the house and the car matchings are computed. The "expected scores" on the family grouping question and for the matching questions are 2.986 and 2.00 respectively.

[6] Correlations between social class, parental education and scores on the cognitive test are as follows:
Cognitive score by SES, $r=.2171$, $p<.001$
Cognitive score by PED, $r=.1975$, $p<.001$

[7] t-tests measuring the differences between the KG and first-grade scores and the expected score are found significant at .001 level of probability, when the null hypothesis, $\mu=15$ is tested.

[8] Correlations between social class, parental education and scores on the behavioral test are as follows:
Behavioral score by SES, $r=.2484$, $p<.001$
Behavioral score by PED, $r=.3061$, $p<.001$

[9] t-tests performed with null hypothesis, $\mu=15$ for the mean scores of KG and first-grade children in different categories of social class were significant at .001 level of probability.

[10] Correlations between social class, parental education and scores on behavioral test within grades are as follows:

for SES:

Grade 3, $r=.5912$, $p<.001$

Grade 5, $r=.3030$, $p<.01$

Grade 6, $r=.3512$, $p<.006$

for PED:

Grade 3, $r=.6760$, $p<.001$

Grade 5, $r=.3781$, $p<.004$

Grade 6, $r=.3621$, $p<.005$

[11] Correlations between sex and scores on the behavioral test are as follows:

Grade 7, $r=.5201$, $p<.004$

Grade 8, $r=.3683$, $p<.01$

[12] Correlations between age, school grade and scores on the evaluative test are as follows:

Evaluative score by age, $r=.2476$, $p<.001$

Evaluative score by school grade, $r=.2795$, $p<.001$

[13] Correlations between social class and parental education and scores on evaluative test are as follows:

Evaluative score by SES, $r=.2271$, $p<.001$

Evaluative score by PED, $r=.2316$, $p<.001$

[14] Correlations between social class and parental education and scores on evaluative test within grades are as follows:

for SES:

Grade 3, $r=.4946$, $p<.001$

Grade 5, $r=.3871$, $p<.003$

for PED:

Grade 3, $r=.6878$, $p<.001$

Grade 5, $r=.3320$, $p<.01$

[15] In grade seven a t-test between the difference of mean scores of boys and girls is found significant at .01 level of probability.

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